

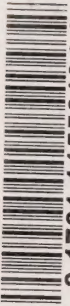


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USING **Food Labels**

TO CHOOSE FOODS FOR
HEALTHY EATING

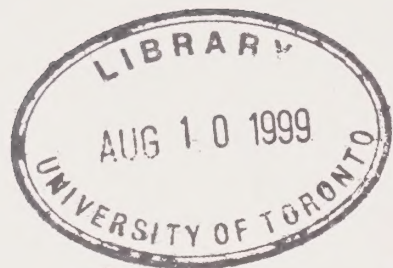


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One of the first steps to healthy eating is knowing what it's all about and being able to use this basic knowledge to make healthy choices when shopping for food.

Shopping for healthy eating is now easier because many packaged foods have nutrition information right on the label.

This pamphlet gives you some tips on how to use the information on food labels to choose foods for healthy eating.



*Copies of *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* are available from your local department of public health.

First... Choosing foods for healthy eating

*Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating** stresses the importance of choosing a variety of foods from **grain products, vegetables & fruit, milk products, meat & alternatives.**

Of the healthy eating messages promoted by the Food Guide, the information on food labels is most helpful in following three of these healthy eating messages:

- ▶ choose whole grain and enriched grain products more often
- ▶ choose lower fat dairy products, leaner meats and foods prepared with little or no fat
- ▶ choose foods containing less salt.



Where to look for healthy eating information

Where do you look on a food label for information about whole or enriched grains or to find out how much fat or salt the food contains?

You should look for nutrition information in three different places... in a **Nutrition Claim**, under **Nutrition Information** or in the **Ingredient List**!

All packaged food must have an **Ingredient List**. However, the use of a **Nutrition Claim** or **Nutrition Information** is optional.

A closer look at the ingredient listing

All packaged foods must list the ingredients used in the product. Ingredients are listed in the order of the amount used. The amount of any ingredient is based on the weight of an ingredient, not the volume.

In this cereal example, whole wheat is the first ingredient listed. This means of all the ingredients used, whole wheat is present in the largest amount.

A closer look at nutrition claims

A **Nutrition Claim** is used to highlight a key nutrition feature of the food. It is often put on the front of a package label in big, bold type.

In the illustration below, claims are made for both fibre and fat.

There are rules set by the government for the use of **Nutrition Claims**. To describe a product using words like “source of” and “low”, the product must meet certain standards.

When a claim is made about any nutrient, detailed nutrition information on that nutrient must also be given somewhere on the package label. In this example, **Nutrition Claims** made about fibre and fat mean that the grams of fibre and fat in one serving of the product must be given. The details are usually given under **Nutrition Information**.



A closer look at nutrition information

Nutrition Information is the heading under which you'll find the detailed nutrition facts about a product. Since nutrients are always listed in the same order, it makes it easier for you to scan a label for the information you want.

Nutrition information is always given for the product as sold. It does not include the nutrient content of ingredients that you may add to a product at home, such as hamburger to a casserole mix or milk to a pudding mix.

Some food packages list just a few facts under **Nutrition Information**. Others, like this cereal box label, provide you with more details. Once you understand a label like this, you'll know how to pick out the key pieces of information from just about any label.

Here are a few key pointers about what you'll find under **Nutrition Information**:

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE WHEAT, WHEAT BRAN, SUGAR, SALT, MALT, THIAMIN HYDROCHLORIDE, PYRIDOXINE HYDROCHLORIDE, FOLIC ACID, REDUCED IRON, BHT.		
NUTRITION INFORMATION		
PER 30 g		
SERVING CEREAL		
(175 mL, 3/4 CUP)		
ENERGY	Cal	100
	kJ	420
PROTEIN	g	3.0
FAT	g	0.6
CARBOHYDRATE		24.0
SUGARS	g	4.4
STARCH	g	16.6
FIBRE	g	3.0
SODIUM	mg	265
POTASSIUM	mg	168
PERCENTAGE OF		
RECOMMENDED		
DAILY INTAKE		
THIAMIN	%	46
NIACIN	%	6
VITAMIN B ₆	%	10
FOLACIN	%	8
IRON	%	28

► **Serving Size** tells you the size of serving for which the nutrition information is given. If you eat more or less than this amount, remember that the Calories and the content of other nutrients like fat and sodium increase or decrease as well!

When food is packaged as a single serving, the nutrition information is given for the single serving portion.

► **Energy** is the Calories (Cal) per serving. Energy is also given in kilojoules (kJ).

► **Fat** shows the total amount of fat in food. Some products also give the content of various kinds of fat: polyunsaturates, monounsaturates, saturates and cholesterol. However, to choose lower fat foods more often, the most useful information is the grams of total fat.

► **Carbohydrate** includes the content of sugars, starch and fibre. In this example you get a complete breakdown of carbohydrate. Sometimes you get information on one type of carbohydrate only.

► **Sodium** is a measure of the amount of salt in a food.

► **Percentage Recommended Daily Intake** is the way in which vitamins and minerals are listed. If you are interested in any one nutrient, the information may be useful to you.

There you have it...the basics of reading food labels. Now for some tips on how to use this information to shop for healthy eating.

Using food labels to choose foods for healthy eating

► To choose whole grains and enriched products more often

Look at the ingredient listing. Are whole grains, like whole wheat, listed, as they are in this cereal example?

And if the product doesn't contain whole grain ingredients, is it enriched? Take pasta for example. Enriched pasta is a better choice than a pasta product that isn't enriched. You will know that the pasta is enriched if the **Ingredient List** includes these nutrients: iron (often listed as ferrous sulfate), niacin, riboflavin and thiamin.

Whether or not the label says so, all white flour and foods made from flour like bread, cookies and muffins are enriched products because all flour in Canada must be enriched.

► To choose lower fat foods more often

Choosing lower fat foods is a key message of healthy eating. Fat is found in a variety of foods: butter, margarine and oils; milk products; meats, poultry and fish; baked goods; snack foods and many convenience products.

Here are some examples of how food labels can help you choose lower fat foods more often.

The labels of many milk products help you choose lower fat products.

Many milk products are labelled with a percentage (%) of butter fat (B.F.) or milk fat (M.F.) on the front of the package. Use this information to choose lower fat milk products such as skim, 1% or 2% milk or yogurt more often. Compare the percentage fat on the labels of cheese and choose lower fat products more often.



Using the Nutrition Information to choose lower fat foods

When a product lists the fat in grams per serving under **Nutrition Information**, you can use this information in two ways.

First, compare the fat content of products and choose the one that is lower in fat. For example: You stop by the grocery store to buy a frozen chicken pot pie. But just before popping it into your cart, you decide to look at the **Nutrition Information** on the label. You see that this product contains almost 25 grams of fat and you decide to compare it to other frozen entrées.

Look what label reading and comparing uncovers! You discover a variety of frozen entrées containing less fat than the chicken pot pie.

As you can see from the **Nutrition Information** on the label of this Shepherd's Pie, a serving provides only 13 grams of fat. Even though you get a larger serving (255 grams) of Shepherd's Pie than pot pie (200 grams), it contains only half the fat.

Shepherd's Pie	Chicken Pot Pie
NUTRITION INFORMATION PER 255 g SERVING (1 PACKAGE)	NUTRITION INFORMATION PER 200 g SERVING (1 PACKAGE)
ENERGY 310 Cal /1300 kJ	ENERGY 444 Cal /1860 kJ
PROTEIN 18 g	PROTEIN 13.2 g
FAT 13 g	FAT 24.7 g
CARBOHYDRATE 31 g	CARBOHYDRATE 42.1 g



FAT INTAKE IN GRAMS FOR THREE DIFFERENT CALORIE LEVELS	
ENERGY (Calories)	FAT (grams)
1800	60
2700	90
3200	105

Second, use fat information to help you plan for healthy eating. Healthy eating today means getting no more than 30% of your day's calories from fat. In grams of fat this amounts to between 60 and 105 grams of fat in total for the day.

These fat benchmarks can help you judge the fat content of a product, on the spot.

Say for instance you are an average woman aiming to keep your fat intake to 60-65 grams of fat a day. If you choose this pot pie, you get almost half the fat for a day in this one small serving of food!

What do you do? You might decide to choose a lower fat entrée such as the Shepherd's Pie. Or you can choose the pot pie, knowing that it is a higher fat choice and you'll have to make up for its extra fat in other ways. To make up for a higher fat food in a meal, you can either choose lower fat foods to round out the meal or you may cut back on fat in other ways, over the next few days.



Caution About Fat Claims

Consumers often think a “cholesterol free” or “no cholesterol” claim means a food is low in fat. It doesn’t. Only foods that come from animals contain cholesterol. Foods made from vegetable sources such as vegetable oil can be very high in fat but contain no cholesterol.

Caution About “Light or Lite” Claims

When foods are described as light or lite, read the label to find out what is light about them. Consumers often think the terms, light or lite, mean lower in calories or fat. Not necessarily so. Foods may be light in texture or taste and not reduced in calories or fat at all. Make sure you read the label!

► To choose foods containing less salt

Canadians get more sodium than they need. Since salt is the major source of sodium in the diet, Canadians are advised to use less salt when preparing foods and to choose salty foods less often. When shopping, check labels and compare brands to help lower the amount of salt you use.

Crackers and canned soups are just some of the products now being made with less salt.

Look for a **Nutrition Claim** such as the one on this cracker label telling you the product contains less salt.

Claim Caution: A product claim of “50% less salt” means the product is *lower* in salt but not necessarily low in salt. Even a salt-reduced product can contain a lot of salt and be a high source of sodium.

The explanation of what the claim means is on the label. In this example, the product contains half the salt of the original cracker of this brand. Because a claim for salt is made, the amount of sodium must be given.

Even though the salt-reduced food may not be low in salt, choosing a product that’s lower in salt than the original is one of many steps to consuming less salt overall.

NUTRITION INFORMATION 1 SERVING = 16.8 g = APPROX. 4 CRACKERS

Energy.....	76 Cal 320 kJ
Protein	1.9 g
Fat	2.5 g
Carbohydrate	11.4 g
Sodium.....	67 mg
Potassium	55 mg

INGREDIENTS: whole wheat, vegetable oil shortening, salt.



There you have it....some tips for using information on food labels to help you choose foods for healthy eating.

The next time you shop, try out your new label-reading skills to put more whole and enriched grains and foods containing less fat and salt in your shopping cart.



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